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# KUSINAGARA

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA

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# KUŚĪNAGARA

BY

Dr D. R. PATIL

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# KUŚĪNAGARA

## 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

KASIA (Lat. 26° 45′ N. and Long. 83° 55′ E.) the headquarters of Padrauna Sub-division is situated 35·41 km north-east of Deoria in the District of the same name in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh. Deoria itself is an important station on the main line of the North-eastern Railway and is connected with Kasia by a good road with a regular bus-service operated by the State Transport Department. Kasia is, however, more conveniently approached from Gorakhpur, the headquarters of another District and of the North-eastern Railway, having facilities of retiring rooms at the railway-station and inspection-bungalows in the city, whence it is 54·72 km to the east by a road, also served by the State bus-service.

Geographically the place forms part of the wide belt of *tarāī* or marshy tract at the foot of the Himalayas, the lower reaches of which are hardly 96·56 km away to the north. The country, therefore, once abounded in very rich forests, which are referred to in the Buddhist books and which even now partly exist on the Gorakhpur-Kasia road. The countryside is extremely fertile and is now specially rich in sugar-cane crops.

The monuments of Kuśīnagara are at a distance of nearly 3·22 km south-west of the town of Kasia. In the vicinity of the monuments a colony of buildings has sprung up under the name of Kushinagar, including a degree college with an attached high school and residential buildings and three public rest-houses or

*dharmaśālās*, one each belonging to the Arakanese and Burmese Buddhists and the third erected by the Birlas for the convenience of pilgrims and visitors. The Indian Tourist Development Corporation has established a decent Traveller's Lodge just opposite the main group of monuments. In addition, there is a well-equipped rest-house recently constructed by the Government of India. Near by is a Sub-circle Office of the Archaeological Survey of India, the staff of which may be contacted for information, if necessary.

## 2. SHORT HISTORY

### A. Before Buddha

*Long ago, Ānanda, there was a king, by name Mahā-Sudarśana, a king of kings, a righteous man who ruled in righteousness. . . This Kuśīnagara, Ānanda, was the royal city of king Mahā-Sudarśana, under the name of Kuśāvatī, and on the east and on the west it was twelve leagues in length and on the north and on the south it was seven leagues in breadth.*[1]

These were the words of Buddha to his favourite disciple Ānanda, when the latter tried to dissuade him from passing away 'in this little wattle and daub down, in the midst of the jungle, in this branch township' of Kuśīnagara, the capital of the tribe of the Mallas. From the words it appears that Kuśīnagara had a traditional history of prosperity behind it, but at the time of Buddha it was a small town, though there are references to its fortification and gates (p. 7).

The Pali texts give a list of the Sixteen Mahājanapadas (Great Kingdoms), which are believed to represent the political divisions of north India and part of the Deccan before the time of Buddha. In it occurs the name of the Malla principality, which is also referred to in the *Mahābhārata* as Malla-rāshṭra. Many

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[1]This and the other quotations on pp. 4, 5 and 8 are from the *Mahā-parinibbāna-suttanta,* translated in T. W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Suttas,* Sacred Books of the East, XI (Oxford, 1881), which contains a detailed description of the events in the last few months of Buddha's life. The proper names have been Sanskritized from Pali, in which the name of the town is Kusinārā. The other Sanskrit forms of the name were Kuśīnagara, Kuśīnagarī, Kuśigrāma, Kuśigrāmaka, etc.

are the legendary princes of the Mallas mentioned in Pali literature; like Rāma of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, they belonged to the Ikshvāku lineage. The Mallas evidently developed a republican constitution some time before the time of Buddha, when it had two branches, respectively at Kuśīnagara and Pāvā.[1] The grove of the Mallas where Buddha attained *parinirvāṇa* is stated to have been situated near the river Hiraṇyavatī.[2]

## B. Buddha and Kuśīnagara

*Go now, Ānanda, and enter into Kuśīnagara, and inform the Mallas of Kuśīnagara, saying 'This day, O Vāsishṭhas, in the last watch of the night, the final passing away of the Tathāgata will take place. Be favourable, herein, O Vāsishṭhas, be favourable. Give no occasion to reproach yourself hereafter, saying, "In our own village did the death of our Tathāgata take place, and we took not the opportunity of visiting the Tathāgata in his last hours".'*

These tender words of Buddha from his death-bed bespeak the familiarity and feelings with which he

[1] Pāvā has been variously identified with Padrauna, 19·31 km to the north of Kuśīnagara, or with Fazilnagar, 19·31 km to its south-west. For the historical and geographical facts about Kuśīnagara, see H. C. Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India*, 6th ed. (Calcutta, 1953), pp. 126 ff.; B. C. Law, *Geography of Early Buddhism* (London, 1932), pp. 14 ff.; and A. Cunningham, *Ancient Geography of India*, ed. S. Majumdar-Sastri (Calcutta, 1924), pp. 493 ff.

[2] Kasia lies about 6·44 km to the east of the Little Gandak, a tributary of the Ghaghra, and 43·45 km west of the Gandak, a tributary of the Ganga. It is likely that the Little Gandak is referred to as Hiraṇyavatī, which may have some what changed its course in historical times.

viewed the Mallas in whose territory he chose to pass the last moments of his life. The Mallas had a very high regard for him. In the course of his earlier visits to the place, Buddha had gained a considerable following here as represented by notable converts like Dabba, Bandhula, Mallika and his wife, etc. In one of the visits he had stayed in a grove, called Baliharaṇa, near the town where he preached the two *Kusinārā-suttas* and *Kinti-sutta*, in which he exhorted the monks to school themselves in the higher lore and in unity and harmony.[1] His close intimacy with the Mallas is easily understandable from the fact that Kuśīnagara is about 100 km south-east of Lumbinī, the place of his birth, and 110 km, as the crow flies of Piprahwa, the ancient site of Kapilavastu. It also fell on the routes connecting the most famous and important cities of the time in northern India which he frequently visited.

## C. The Parinirvāṇa

> *I too, O Ānanda, am now grown old, and full of years, my journey is drawing to its close, I have reached my sum of days, I am turning eighty years of age; and just as a worn-out cart, Ānanda, can only with much additional care be made to move along, so, methinks, the body of the Tathāgata can only be kept going with much additional care.*

Thus spoke Buddha to Ānanda while passing a rainy season at a village called Beluva near Vaiśālī,[2]

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[1]*Aṅguttara-Nikāya,* II, ed. R. Morris, Pali Text Society (London, 1888), p. 79; V, ed. E. Hardy (London, 1900), pp. 79 ff.; *Majjhima-Nikāya,* II, ed. R. Chalmers (London, (1898), pp. 238 ff.

[2] Identified with Basarh, 35·41 km south-west of Muzaffarpur in north Bihar.

when he was attacked by illness and bodily pain and the effect of old age and of the continuous strain of ceaseless wanderings of nearly half a century for the propagation of his doctrines were telling badly upon his health. After the rains he left Vaiśālī, the chief town of the republican clan of the Lichchhavis, admired by him. After crossing the land of the Lichchhavis with Ānanda, he passed through several villages, till he reached the town of Pāvā, where he halted for the night in the mango-grove of Chunda, a worker in metals. Next day, he took his meals with Chunda but was almost immediately afterwards taken sick with much pain in his body. Bearing all the ailment with fortitude, he proceeded with Ānanda to Kuśīnagara. On the way, he reached the bank of the Kakutsthā, where he bathed and drank water, after crossing which he complained of weariness. The party then moved to the grove of *śāla* trees (*Shorea robusta*, Hindi *sāl*) of the Mallas, the *upavartana* of Kuśīnagara, on the further side of the Hiraṇyavatī. Realizing that his end was fast approaching, he asked Ānanda to prepare a bed for him, with its head to the north, between two *śāla* trees. For Ānanda, who, for twenty years past, had most devotedly attended on his master, it was a most trying scene. Buddha spoke to him affectionately and uttered his memorable words on the doctrines of the faith as well as on some rules of discipline to be followed by the monks, including instructions about the disposal of his body.[1]

[1]Buddha's instructions were that his body should be disposed of in the same way as that of a king of kings: the body should be wrapped in new cloth and corded cotton-wool, placed in an iron oil-vessel, which should be covered by a similar vessel, and cremated. *Stūpas* should thereafter be erected at the four cross-roads.

As desired by Buddha, the Mallas of Kuśīnagara came and paid their respects to him. The mendicant Subhadra, one hundred and twenty years of age, also came with a view to resolving his doubts and, having heard Buddha, was converted. Immediately after his conversion he passed away with the honour of being the last of Buddha's converts. Buddha then asked the assembled monks to speak out if any one of them had any doubt and, observing their silence, uttered his last words: 'Bohold thee, brethren, I exhort thee, saying, "Decay is inherent in all component things! Work out your salvation with diligence".' He then fell into a trance and attained *parinirvāṇa.* It was then the fullmoon night of the month of Vaiśākha (April-May).[1]

For the next six days, during which the body lay in state, the Mallas made preparations for a befitting funeral under the directions of Aniruddha, a cousin and follower of Buddha. On the seventh day, they honoured the body with perfumes, garlands and appropriate music. The body was then carried into the town through the northern gate and then out of it through the eastern gate to the Makuṭabandhana-chaitya, the sacred shrine of the Mallas. Here a funeral pile was arranged and the body laid on it for cremation. In the meantime the news had reached Mahā-Kāśyapa, the most celebrated of Buddha's disciples, who arrived at the scene well in time before the pile was lit. The last ceremonies were performed

[1]Buddha is stated to have died two hundred and eighteen years before the coronation of Aśoka; according to this calculation, therefore, Buddha's death took place some time between 487 and 483 B.C. On all historical considerations such a date works satisfactorily. However, the Ceylonese tradition, followed in the south-eastern Buddhist countries, places the event in 544-543 B.C.

by him and the body cremated with due honours. The relics of the body were then collected by the Mallas and taken ceremoniously to Kuśīnagara with a view to enshrining them in *stūpas*.

The news of Buddha's death spread far and wide: king Ajātaśatru of Rājagṛiha, the Lichchhavis of Vaiśālī, the Śākyas of Kapilavastu, the Bulis of Alakappa, the Koliyas of Rāmagrāma and the Mallas of Pāvā, together with a Brāhmaṇa, claimed a share of the relics from the Mallas of Kuśīnagara and on the latter's refusal were on the point of waging a war for the shares. Apprehending bloodshed, Droṇa, a wise Brāhmaṇa, entreated them for peace and patience and distributed the relics successfully into eight shares; one of them went to the Mallas of Kuśīnagara, who presumably enshrined it suitably in a *stūpa* in their town with appropriate honours and ceremonies.

## D. Subsequent History

*There are these four places, Ānanda, which the believing man should visit with feelings of reverence and awe. Which are the four ?*

*The place, Ānanda, at which the believing man can say, 'Here the Tathāgata was born'. . .*

*The place, Ānanda, at which the believing man can say, 'Here the Tathāgata attained to the supreme and perfect insight'...*

*The place, Ānanda, at which the believing man can say, 'Here was the kingdom of righteousness set on foot by the Tathāgata'...*

*The place, Ānanda, at which the believing man can say, 'Here the Tathāgata passed finally away in that utter passing away which leaves nothing whatever to remain behind'...*

In one of his last utterances, Buddha thus named Kuśīnagara, the site of his *parinirvāṇa*, as one of the

chief places of Buddhist pilgrimage, the other three being the places of his Birth, Enlightenment and First Sermon.[1] Its sanctity thus assured, Kuśīnagara was destined to be a great place of pilgrimage to the Buddhist world. The Mallas had already made a beginning in that direction by erecting a *stūpa*, wherein their share of the relics of Buddha lay enshrined.

For two centuries after the Great Decease, however, Kuśīnagara does not seem to have risen much in importance. The tiny republic of the Mallas had, in the meantime, been swallowed by the rising empire of Magadha (south Bihar) with its capital at Pāṭaliputra (modern Patna), which, in course of time, came to be ruled by a personality of the greatest significance and importance to the history of Buddhism, viz., Aśoka of the Mauryan dynasty (*circa* 273-236 B.C.). In the course of his pilgrimage to the holy places of Buddhism, Aśoka also visited Kuśīnagara and, it is said, erected *stūpas* and pillars at the site. What monuments were actually erected by him here and of what size and shape is difficult to say for certain, though we hear more than eight hundred years later from the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang that he saw at the place three *stūpas* and two pillars ascribed in his time to that emperor (p. 11). The excavations at the site, however, have yielded a few structures with unusually large-sized bricks often attributed to the Mauryan age; but their character is uncertain (pp. 27 and 28).

Though Kuśīnagara does not figure much in the history of the following five centuries after Aśoka, there is no doubt that its sanctity and importance grew considerably; for, during this period, Buddhism was

[1]These places are respectively represented by Lumbinī in the Napalese *tarāī*, Bodh Gaya near Gaya in south Bihar and Sārnāth near Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh.



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not only a very popular and flourishing religion in the whole of India but had also spread rapidly over distant lands. Monumental buildings like *stūpas* and monasteries must, therefore, have been erected here by the faithful, an inference well-supported by excavations: they indicate that there did exist here a sacred monument of this period, obviously a *stūpa*, which, though no longer to be seen, was surrounded by minor *stūpas* and a number of monasteries, some of them still existing in ruins. A Buddhist pilgrim from China, named Fa-hien, visited Kuśīnagara between A.D. 399 and 414 and found the town with inhabitants 'few and far between comprising only the families belonging to the societies of monks.' He also saw a number of *stūpas* and monasteries marking the holy spots which had once witnessed the memorable events connected with the Great Decease.[1] He thus apparently refers to some of the buildings exposed in the excavations, and from his brief account it appears that Kuśīnagara was, in his days, essentially a religious township.

At the time of Fa-hien's visit Kuśīnagara formed part of the rising empire of the Guptas, under whom India witnessed a most remarkable progress in the fields of art and culture. Buddhism had by now completed a millennium of its progressive existence in the country and was flourishing vigorously, which was reflected at Kuśīnagara by a greater building activity. In the reign of Kumāragupta (A.D. 413-55), a devout Buddhist of the name of Haribala installed the colossal Nirvāṇa statue of Buddha, now seen in the Nirvāṇa temple (p. 19) and possibly restored or renovated the Main Stūpa behind it. Some of the older monasteries were perhaps repaired and new ones erected. It would seem that the establishment of Kuśīnagara had, under

[1]J. Legge, *Travels of Fa-hien* (Oxford, 1886), p. 70.

the Guptas, reached the peak of its prosperity and importance.

A century or so later, however, we get a somewhat tragic picture of desertion of the place, as would appear from a more detailed account of Kuśīnagara given by the famous Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang, who visited India between A.D. 620 and 644. He found the place in ruins surrounded by an air of gloominess and desolation. The avenues of the town were deserted with only the brick foundations of its walls to be seen.[1] He mentions further 'a great brick *vihāra*, in which is a figure of the *Nirvāṇa* of Tathāgata. He is lying with his head to the north as if asleep. By the side of this *vihāra* is a *stūpa* built by Aśoka-rāja; although in a ruinous state, yet it is some 60·96 m in height. Before it is a stone pillar to record the *Nirvāṇa* of Tathāgata; although there is an inscription on it, yet there is no date as to year or month.' In addition to these, the pilgrim refers to other sacred monuments in the locality, such as the *stūpa* built over the place where Subhadra died, another *stūpa* over the cremation-ground, a third one on a spot where Mahā-Kāśyapa paid his last homage to Buddha's dead body and a fourth one said to have been erected by Aśoka with an inscribed pillar in front recording its construction at the place where

[1] From all accounts it is clear that the town Kuśīnagara of the Mallas was different from the site of Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, though it is also clear that they were situated close to each other. While excavations have exposed the monuments associated with the *parinirvāṇa*, the town-site has not been identified and excavated, but its remains must be laying hidden near by. The religous importance of Kuśīnagara was certainly greater than its political importance, for, with the incorporation of the Malla principality into the Mauryan empire (p. 9), the town inevitably lost its political status.

the relics were distributed. He also states to have seen about half-a-dozen other *stūpas* marking the spots where the miraculous events connected with the Great Decease were believed to have taken place.[1]

A generation after Hiuen Tsang, another Chinese pilgrim named I-tsing visited Kuśīnagara, but he gives little factual information about the monuments.[2] After he went away we hear no more of Kuśīnagara from any historical or literary source. With the slow decline of Buddhism in northern India during the subsequent centuries, the place may have suffered in prosperity and importance. Some building activity was, however, still going on, as is evident from the excavated remains. The monasteries continued to survive and to be added to and a few *stūpas* or temples built, though the general decline in the importance of the place was obvious. In about the tenth or eleventh century, in the times of a local chief of the Kalachuri dynasty, a monastery with a chapel attached to it enshrining a colossal statue of the seated Buddha was, no doubt, constructed, as is obvious from an inscriptional record (p. 30). This statue still stands at the place of its erection under the queer name of Māthā-kuar installed in a modern shrine (p. 29). But these were events in the last passing phases of Buddhism in India, for hardly within a century or so thereafter it practically disappeared from the land of its birth. Beyond the frontiers of India it no doubt lived with considerable followings, but the sacred place of the Great Decease seems to have gone beyond the reach of the faithful, to whom its sanctity and greatness were no longer of any living interest. The

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[1] S. Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World* (London, 1906), II, pp. 31 ff.

[2] J. Takakusu, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion* (Oxford, 1896), p. xxxiii.

monuments were deserted and forsaken and were in the midst of a wilderness, left to be buried by the forces of nature and to the whims of a local people, who, as is common and natural, cared only for their bricks to be used in their buildings and for the flattened surfaces of the mounds to be ploughed for their crops. History had drawn its curtain over even the identity of Kuśīnagara, faint traces of which, however, appear to have been left in the strange stories told of its ruins by the local people and in a somewhat corrupted name of the straggling village of Kasia near by.

After a silence of more than half a millennium, we hear of the place for the first time from Buchanan, an officer of the East India Company, who visited it in the course of his survey-work early in the last century.[1] He mentions it, by the name of Kesiya, as consisting of hardly a hundred huts with a police-station. He saw the ruins and described them, but, like the local people, he was little aware of their identity and their possible significance to the Buddhist world. In 1854, H. H. Wilson casually suggested the identity of Kuśīnagara and Kasia,[2] but it was only Alexander Cunningham, the Archaeological Surveyor, who, in the course of his visit to it in 1861-62, could, with his characteristic insight into Buddhist geography, place the identification on solid grounds.[3] The village-name was pronounced to him variously as Kusia or Kasia, instead of the 'Kesiya' of Buchanan. The local names of the ruins and mounds engaged his attention. The main site

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[1] M. Matrin, *History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India*, II (London, 1838), pp. 357 ff.

[2] *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, XIV (1856), p. 246, where the place-name is given as Kusia.

[3] A. Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India Report*, I (Simla, 1871), pp. 76 ff.

was called Māthā-kuar-kā-koṭ (instead of Mātākumar of Buchanan) or the fort of Māthā-kuar, who, according to local belief, was represented in the large stone image of a seated figure lying unsheltered on a low mound near by. A kilometre and a half to their east lay the large hillock of brick ruins, which, to the people, was known by the name of Rāmabhār Ṭila (or mound). It was difficult for Cunningham to read the correct historical significance behind these names, though he tried to interpret the name *māthā-kuar* to mean the 'dead prince',[1] thus referring, by implication, to Buddha, who had belonged to the princely family of the Śākyas of Kapilavastu and died at the place. Fifteen years later, A. C. L. Carlleyle, Cunningham's assistant, did extensive digging at the site and completely exposed the great central *stūpa* and, most important of all, discovered, right at its front, the famous reclining statue of Buddha, the Nirvāṇa statue (p. 19), buried in the debris of the ruins of an oblong shrine.[2]

Though the location of ancient Kuśīnagara thus appeared to be quite certain, doubts were still raised about its accuracy. Better-planned excavations were, therefore, undertaken by the Archaeological Survey of India in the years 1904 to 1907 under J. Ph. Vogel and in the years 1910 to 1912 by Hirananda Shastri,[3] as a result of which numerous brick buildings were discovered clustering round the great central monuments and

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[1] From *māthā*, 'to kill' and *kuar* (Sanskrit *kumāra*) 'prince'. Hiuen Tsang sometimes uses the name Kumāra-rāja for Buddha, who was, however, never so called in the sacred texts.

[2] *Archaeological Survey of India Report*, XVIII (Calcutta, 1883), pp. 62 ff.; XXII (Calcutta, 1885), pp. 16 ff.

[3] *Annual Report, Archaeological Survey of India*, 1904-05 (1908), pp. 43 ff.; 1905-06 (1909), pp. 61 ff.; 1906-07 (1909), pp. 43 ff.; 1910-11 (1914), pp. 63 ff.; 1911-12 (1915), pp. 134 ff.

representing monasteries and secondary *stūpas* and shrines. These excavations yielded indubitable proofs of the identity of Kuśīnagara and of the monuments in numerous inscriptional records, viz., seals and a copper-plate, the former referring to the monasteries attached to the monument of the Great Decease (*Māhā-parinirvāṇa-vihāra*) and the latter to the *stūpa* or monument of the Great Decease (*Parinirvāṇa-chaitya*) itself. Strangely enough, none of these records makes any direct mention of the name of Kuśīnagara or any of its equivalents.

The conclusions of these discoveries were most welcome and heartening to archaeologists and particularly to Buddhists, to whom one of the four most cherished sacred places of Buddhism was thus happily reclaimed. There was consequently a renewal of the religious and cultural activities consistent with the modern times, as is evident from the ever-growing colony of monastic establishments and *dharmaśālās* and attendant educational and cultural institutions seen in the neighbourhood of the holy site. Some of the most sacred monuments were also restored (pp. 19 and 29). After the lapse of some seven centuries Kuśīnagara has thus come to life again.

# 3. THE MONUMENTS

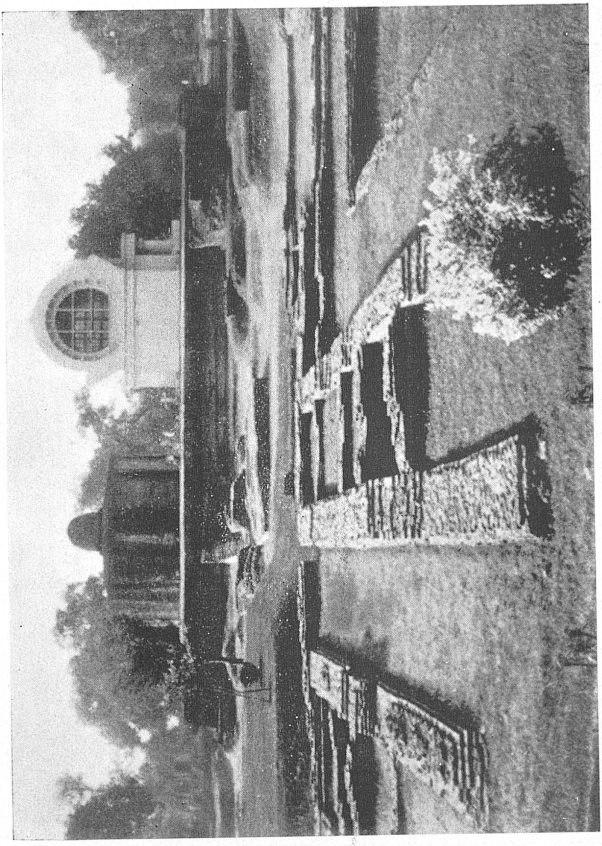
The monuments of Kuśīngara are situated in three distinct groups (cf. fig. on p. 17), viz., the Main Site (pl. VII), comprising the Main Stūpa and Nirvāṇa Temple (pls. I, II and III) with the other surrounding monuments (pl. IV), the shrine called Māthā-kuar to its south-west and the Cremation Stūpa (Rāmabhār, pl. VI), a little less than a kilometre to the east of the latter.

## A. The Main Site (pl. VII)

This group is the most important and extensive of all the three, with the Main Stūpa and Nirvāṇa Temple (pl. I) at the centre, both standing on a raised plinth, and ruins of numerous monasteries, smaller *stūpas* and shrines surrounding them. As stated before (p. 11), Hiuen Tsang describes a temple or *vihāra* with a grand *stūpa* behind it rising to a height of about 60·96 m, which, it may be presumed, are represented in these two monuments, with some later repairs, additions and renovations.

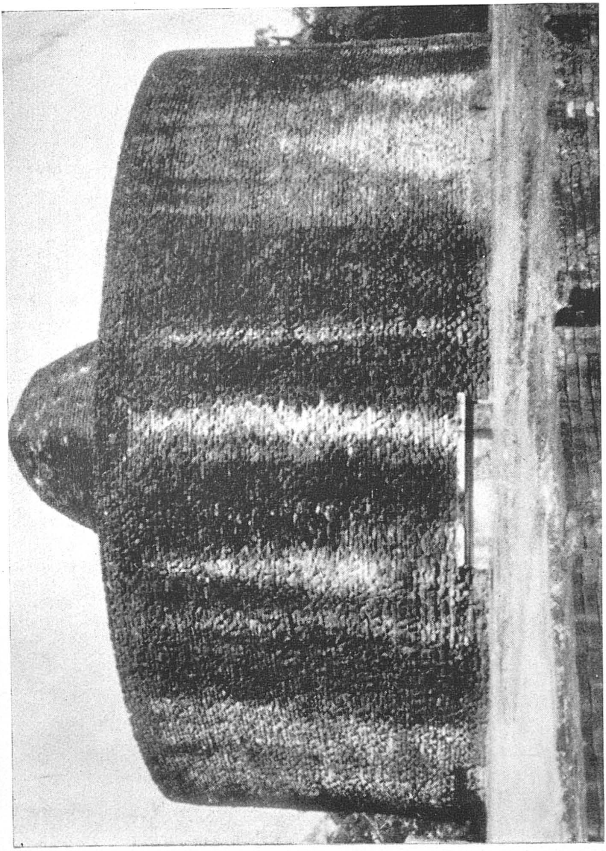
*The Main Stūpa.*—The Stūpa (A on pl. VII) was excavated and completely exposed by Carlleyle in 1876. It was then a huge mass of brickwork in a tottering condition, representing the core of what must once have been a grand structure, which, inclusive of its pinnacle, may once have reached the height of nearly 45·72 m. The plinth on which the Stūpa and the temple were erected was 2·74 m higher than the ground-level. Above it stood the cylindrical neck of the Stūpa to a height of 5·49 m fringed along its top with the remnants of a row of decorative and miniature pilasters. On

PLATE I



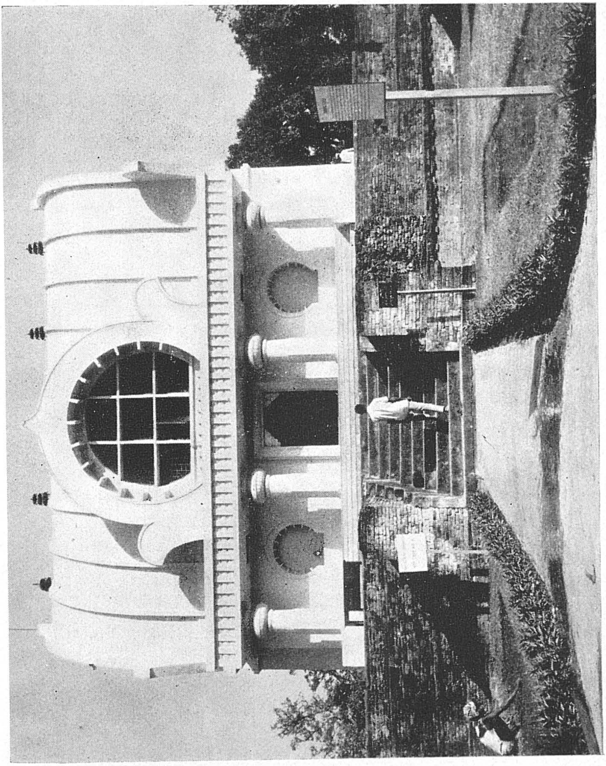
*General view of the Main Stūpa and Nirvāṇa Temple.* *See p. 16*

PLATE II



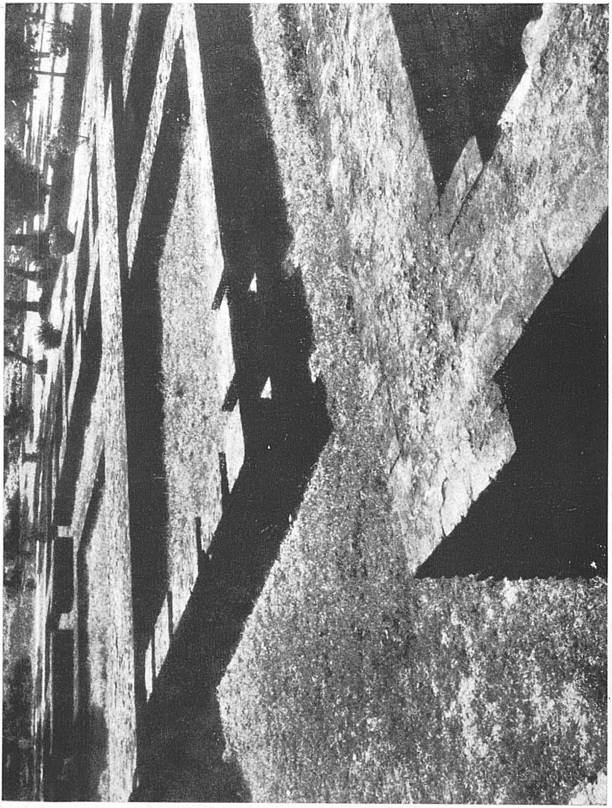
The Main *Stūpa* after restoration. See pp. 16 and 19

PLATE III

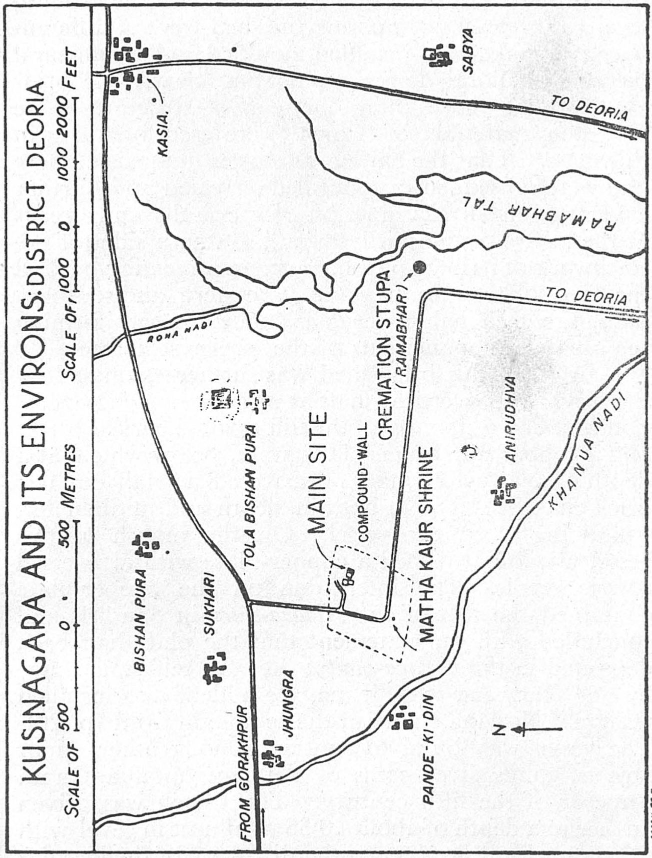


The *Nirvāṇa Temple.* *See pp. 16 and 22*

PLATE IV



*View of the excavated remains.* *See p. 16*


KUSINAGARA AND ITS ENVIRONS: DISTRICT DEORIA
SCALE OF 500 0 500 METRES
SCALE OF 1000 0 1000 2000 FEET
KASIA
SABYA
TO DEORIA
RAMABHAR TAL
CREMATION STUPA
(RAMABHAR)
TO DEORIA
ROHA NADI
TOLA BISHAN PURA
MAIN SITE
COMPOUND-WALL
MATHA KAUR SHRINE
ANIRUDHVA
KHANUA NADI
BISHAN PURA
SUKHARI
JHUNGRA
FROM GORAKHPUR
PANDE-KI-DIN
N

this neck was the dome proper with only its broken brick-shell exposed, its top about 19·81 m above the ground-level. The bricks composing the shell were of different sizes and makes and included moulded and ornamental pieces with floral devices, indicating clearly the prior existence of more than one earlier structure at the site, the materials of which were used for filling in this mass. That the earlier structures had existed here and were subsequently concealed or sealed up is further evident from an examination of the faults and breaks at the centre of the northern and southern sides of the brickwork of its huge plinth. Further, projecting beyond the faces of the plinth along its eastern and southern sides, are seen half-concealed smaller *stūpas*, forming the usual accompaniments of the earlier structure.

In 1910, this brick-shell was further examined by the driving of a vertical shaft at its centre. The operation revealed at the top of the filling some carved bricks and a copper coin of king Jayagupta, below which, at a depth of nearly 4·27 m was discovered a small circular brick chamber, 0·64 m both in depth and in diameter, containing a copper vessel. On the mouth of this vessel was found placed a copper-plate with a reversed cowrie on it. The inscription on the copper-plate contained the text of the *Nidāna-sūtra* in Sanskrit and concluded with the statement that the plate had been deposited in the *nirvāṇa-chaitya* (i.e. this self-same *stūpa*) by one Haribala, who, it may be added, also installed the great Nirvāṇa statue in the temple in front (p. 20). The vessel was found to contain, among other minor objects, some silver coins of Kumāragupta, a Gupta emperor of the fifth century. The trench was driven further to a depth of about 10·36 m almost in level with the natural soil, leading to the discovery of the circular plinth of a 'perfect little *stūpa*', 2·82 m high, with a small niche on its western exterior enshrining a

terracotta figure of Buddha sitting cross-legged in meditation. Inside the *stūpa* were found pieces of charcoal and earth, presumably from the funeral pyre of some Buddhist monk (if not of Buddha himself). The *stūpa* was in a well-preserved condition and thus may not have been much earlier than the Main Stūpa encasing it. The figure of Buddha on its niche was, however, artistically simpler in execution and on stylistic grounds could very well be assigned to the beginning of the Christian era. The digging was carried to a further depth of 0·84 m, where a piece of rotten wood was found and the water-table reached.

In 1927, the Stūpa was completely restored out of the donations of U Po Kyu and U Po Hlaing of Burma. Inside its drum a small chamber, representing a miniature replica of the original Stūpa, was constructed at a height of 6·1 m above the ground-level. On the 18th of March 1927, between 6 and 10.30 A.M., this chamber was ceremoniously closed, in the presence of sixteen Buddhist priests headed by Rev. U Chardramani, with numerous objects of gold, silver and copper, and a copper-plate inscription was deposited inside recordintg he fact and circumstances of the discovery and identification of the monument and the site by the Archaeological Survey of India and its restoration (pl. II).

*The Nirvāṇa Temple.*—The temple (B on pl. VII) stands on the same plinth as the Stūpa behind it. As mentioned above (p. 14), the ruins of this temple and the reclining Nirvāṇa statue inside were discovered by Carlleyle in 1876. By sinking a vertical trench at the centre of its mound he first discovered the great statue in a much-shattered condition lying on a broken pedestal. Many of its broken parts were then missing, and it appeared that it had once in the past been repaired with plaster. In his search for the missing

parts he found many of them buried in the core of the pedestal itself. With their help he restored and repaired the statue and the pedestal almost to their original forms and shapes, though some of the broken fragments of the statue were still wanting.

The statue measures 6·1 m in length and is executed out of one block of sandstone of mixed reddish colour probably from Chunar. It represents the Dying Buddha reclining on his right side with his face turned towards the west. It is placed on a large brick pedestal with stone posts at the corners and once faced with stone slabs on all the sides. The western side of the pedestal facing the entrance, however, bears sculptures representing three human figures, each carved in a shallow niche cut into a solid block of stone. The figure to the extreme left represents a female in mourning with dishevelled long hair and crouching forward in grief with her hands resting on the ground. The figure to the extreme right is indistinct but may represent a male or female, also in grief, as indicated by the head resting on the right hand. The central figure represents a man sitting cross-legged with the back turned towards the spectator. Right below him is an inscription datable to the fifth century A.D., recording that the statue was 'the appropriate religious gift of the *Mahāvihāra-svāmin* Haribala' and that 'it was fashioned by Din. . .' It is difficult to identify the personalities of the three mourners, though the central figure may be presumed to be that of the donor Haribala himself.

After the clearance of the débris around the statue, Carlleyle found the shrine-chamber to be oblong on plan with an oblong antechamber in front towards its west. The thickness of the walls of the chamber was nearly 3·05 m, its interior measuring 9·35 m in length and 3·66 m in width, leaving a space of hardly 0·61 m to move around the pedestal. The walls were very badly

அன்பளிப்பு
அமரர். ஆர். திருமலை, இ.ஆ.ப
GIFTED BY
R. TIRUMALAI I.A.S. (Late)



shattered showing only one entrance facing west. The antechamber measured internally 10·92 m in length and 4·57 m in width with an entrance facing west, its walls being 1·22 m in thickness.

In the course of clearance Carlleyle found numerous bricks with slightly smooth and curved surface, which led him to believe that the temple once had a roof with arched vault with a pointed end. The ruins and débris further indicated to him that there had originally existed an entrance-doorway facing west and a window in each of the northern and southern side-walls of the shrine-chamber as well as of the antechamber and consisted of arched vaults. Proceeding on these assumptions he completely restored the temple in 1876.

There is no doubt that the temple so hypothetically restored by Carlleyle did not essentially conform to the one in which the great statue had originally been installed in the fifth century A.D. From the evidence of the later plaster repairs to the statue, it is likely that the original temple might also have undergone changes in the succeeding centuries. There were, besides, traces of a larger and definitely earlier temple with recessed corners close to the northern and southern walls of the present one, indicating that a large temple enshrining the statue had existed on the spot before the construction of the temple restored by Carlleyle. It is, however, difficult to say whether this earlier temple was the same in which the statue had originally been installed and which was seen by Hiuen Tsang (p. 11). The temple discovered and restored by Carlleyle must have belonged to a much later period representing the expiring days of Buddhism, possibly even later than the eleventh or twelfth century, as would be obvious from its clumsy architectural features having no parallel in any Buddhist sanctuary in India.

In May 1955, a committee was appointed by the Government of India for the improvement of the sites connected with the life of Buddha for the ensuing 2500th Buddha Jayanti celebrations. On the representation of the Buddhists the committee considered it absolutely necessary to remove the restored structure entirely, as it offered practically no space for the pilgrims to circumambulate the statue and made the interior entirely suffocating, and proposed to build a new structure suitably designed in conformity with the character and importance of the monument. As a result thereof the present temple (pl. III) was constructed in 1956.

*The Western Group.*—Ranged round the Stūpa and the Nirvāṇa temple are to be seen a number of brick structures which were raised from time to time as complements to the nucleus formed by the most sacred monument. Close to the entrance of the temple, to the north-west, one sees some structural ruins at a level much lower than that of the long array of buildings to the west. They represent the ruins of two monasteries (marked Q and Q′ on pl. VII), somewhat alike on plan and erected side by side. In the excavation were found a number of inscribed and datable objects, including a clay seal with the representation of the coffin of Buddha in between two *śāla* trees and the legend *mahāparinirvāṇa* and *bhikshu-saṅgha* in two lines, two other seals with a similar legend and a clay tablet with the figure of standing Maitreya and the well-known Buddhist formula. All the legends were in a script assignable to the fourth century. A silver coin (perhaps of a Satrap of western India, Dāmasena) was also found here, as also some broken terracotta figures and a good amount of pottery including a clay censer with crocodile mouth. It appears from the evidence of these finds

and the deep level at which they were found that both the monasteries were built earlier than the fourth century.

To the west, in front of the temple, is seen a very large block of buildings covering a length of 109·73 m. Of them, the one to the north (D on pl. VII) measures 45·72 m square externally. It represents the largest monastery so far discovered at the place and comprises, in fact, not one but two monasteries of different periods and constructions, the latter being built on the ruins and foundations of the earlier one with some additions and alterations. The earlier monastery is indicated by the brickwork at the lower levels and consisted of a large open court paved with bricks with a still-existing circular well in its northern portion. It was enclosed by corridors about 3·05 m wide on all its four sides, which, in turn, were surrounded by rows of small cells of slightly varying sizes for the residence of monks. The cells and the corridors had concrete floors. The monastery faced east and was accessible through an entrance flanked by a projecting turret on each side and was floored with concrete. The walls were very massive and thick, indicating a possibility that the building had several storeys. During excavation were found an inscribed clay seal, datable to about A.D. 900 in the well and a number of similar seals in the débris covering the courtyard. This indicated that the building had been constructed in about the eighth century and deserted some time after A.D. 900.

A century or so later, a new but much inferior construction was raised on the ruined foundations of the older monastery by levelling down the débris and thus raising its floor-level by nearly 18·3 m. While doing this, the builders freely used carved bricks and materials from the ruins of the older structures; they are seen here and there in the later wall. The later monastery

was almost identical on plan with the earlier one. It appears, however, that the entrance-chamber formed by the two flanking turrets of the earlier monastery was filled up to the maximum height of nearly 2·74 m with an eastward slope to offer a sloping entrance to the later monastery with a higher floor-level. As compared with the existing ruins of the earlier monastery, much less now remains of the later construction, as obviously its bricks had been quarried away by the neighbouring villagers.

Along the southern wall of this monastery are seen other similar buildings forming a compact block of four structures representing four separate but inter-connected monasteries differing on plan and in dimensions. Of them, the north-eastern building (L on pl. VII) is situated exactly opposite the Nirvāṇa temple in front, its orientation being slightly oblique to the alignment of the central monuments. It consists of a square open court, with a circular well at the centre, surrounded possibly by a covered verandah in front of the rows of cells on all the four sides. To the west of this building is another structure (M on pl. VII), consisting of a similar open court with a rectangular tank at its centre but with cells or rooms only on its northern and western sides. In the course of the excavation of these two structures, inscribed clay seals datable to the Gupta age (fourth-fifth century) were found along with metal vessels and other objects on their floors and in the well referred to. These monasteries therefore belonged to some earlier period. Of the other two buildings in this block, the one at the centre (N on pl. VII) is also a monastery consisting of a rectangular court with corridors on its east, north and west and a row of rooms further east and west. The building adjoining it further south (O on pl. VII) is a much larger one, 33·53 m square in dimensions, with

an open court enclosed by corridors and rows of five cells of varying dimensions on each of all the four sides. Its rooms had concrete floors, while its open court was paved with bricks. It has its entrance facing east. The building once bore a flat-terraced roof. In the course of excavation a number of inscribed and datable objects, including a gold coin of Chandragupta II (fourth-fifth century A.D., were found. In one of the rooms a very fragmentary inscription of Kushana age (first century A.D.) was recovered, while in the courtyard were discovered numerous pieces of an image in the red sandstone of the Mathura region, representing a standing figure of Buddha, with an inscription of about the fifth century on its pedestal referring to the fact that it was executed by one Dinna of Mathura.[1] Thus, all the four monasteries in this block were erected in the first century and were destroyed some time about A.D. 600.

*The Southern Group.*—The monuments in this group represent mostly small-sized *stūpas* raised from time to time by devout pilgrims in token of their pious visits to the holy monuments. It appears that the monuments were enclosed on the south by a wall proceeding from a considerable length. At the centre of this group two *stūpas* stand out rather prominently because of the carved brickwork and ornamental pilasters and cornices of their basements, which resemble closely the earlier plinth of the Main Stūpa (p. 16) and may, therefore, belong to an earlier date. Further, there is an interesting oblong structure (F on pl. VII) to the north of them

[1] There is reference to a person with a similar name in the inscription on the pedestal of the Nirvāṇa statue of the same period (p. 20). It is likely that the same person is referred to in both the records.

touching, or partly concealed by, the plinth of the main monument. Inside it is a block of solid brickwork oblong on plan and resembling a coffin or grave. It is not in alignment with the plinth and would appear to be a much earlier building. It faces west with an entrance 1·57 m wide, on both sides of which, at the corners, were once placed terracotta images of Buddha in meditation. The large structure in the eastern portion of this group belongs to the expiring days of Buddhism at Kuśīnagara, as is obvious from its crude construction in which bricks of various sizes, collected from the earlier ruins, were freely used.

*The Eastern Group.*—The most important and interesting of the ruins in the eastern group is the large platform-like brick structure (C on pl. VII), a little obliquely orientated towards the main monument. As it is seen now, it consists of two terraces, the lower one being square with a flight of steps giving access to it at its north-western end. The second or upper terrace is smaller, thus leaving a margin of about 3·66 m for a brick-paved procession-path all around it. The path is, however, not uniformly wide on all sides, since the sides of both the terraces are not quite parallel. While the walls of the lower terrace are plain except for the decorative brick mouldings and string-courses, the walls of the upper terrace once bore a number of decorative mouldings and cornices together with a continuous row of ornamental pilasters, traces of some of which are still visible on the structure. There was perhaps a third and smaller terrace above, but it no longer exists. What sacred monument is represented by this quaint building it is difficult to say, but it may have been surmounted by a *stūpa* of an uncommon type. There is nothing to show that a temple stood at the top, though an image of Gaṇeśa, apparently imported, was

found in the ruins. Since there is no mention of any such structure by Hiuen Tsang, it may be assigned to a date later than the seventh century A. D.

Against the north-western corner of this terraced building was discovered a small structure (H on pl. VII) built of large-sized bricks, the largest to be found at the place (48·26 × 25·4 × 7·62 cm and 46·20 × 25·4 × 6·99 cm) resembling bricks commonly assigned to the Mauryan age. The walls exist only in three courses of bricks with a thickness of 48·26 cm. The structure represents a small chamber, 2·54 × 2·92 m, and its eastern wall appears to go further northwards. In the corner formed by this projecting wall copper coins, eight of Kanishka and four of Kadphises II, were found mixed with charred substance, indicating that this building had been destroyed in the Kushana period. From the facts that its orientation is different from that of the main monument and that it stands at a lower level, its higher antiquity is obvious. It may have formed part of a much larger building which has either disappeared or is concealed under the plinth of the main monument close by. Along the eastern side of the plinth of the main monument are also to be seen a few small-sized *stūpas* partly concealed in the plinth. They are obviously earlier in date and are related to an earlier central monument later encased by the plinth of the Main Stūpa.

*The Northern Group*.—To the north of this small building, which may be assigned to the Mauryan age, are seen a number of small *stūpas* raised by pilgrims like those in the southern group (p. 25). To their west, at a a lower level, are seen the ruins of two square-shaped structures representing some early shrines, with a later wall crossing over them running from north to south and meeting the plinth of the Main Stūpa. Much

overlapping of constructional activities might have taken place here from very early times, possibly the Mauryan period, down to the tenth century. In the area further west, some of the walls contain bricks of very large sizes usually ascribed to the Mauryan age. Similar large bricks were found in the same area in the course of deep digging, though the structures to which they belonged had already disappeared. The digging further yielded an interesting terracotta female figurine of perhaps the first century A. D. and a fragmentary stone inscription of the fifth century A. D.

Further northwards are situated the ruins of an array of buildings much in the same manner as the row of the western monasteries ranged in front of the Nirvāṇa temple. They, however, face south towards the central monument and represent two separate monasteries, of which the western one (I on pl. VII) consists of a central open space occupied by a square tank enclosed by a dwarf-wall and floored with bricks. On all sides of the tank are verandahs with the monastic cells facing them. Towards the south are traces of two projecting rooms flanking the entrance. The eastern building (J on pl. VII) has not been excavated completely, but it may also be found to consist of the same plan as that of the other neighbouring monasteries. Some inscribed seals, found in the excavation of the central monastery, may place this group of monasteries in about the ninth or tenth century A. D.

In the extreme eastern portion of the Main Site are seen the ruins of an isolated building, which, strangely enough, faces east, as indicated by the two projections flanking its entrance on that side, and not towards the Main Stūpa. Unlike the other monasteries, it had no central open space or courtyard but had instead a large detached hall, 9·14 m square, with an entrance facing north and with two windows on each of the

other sides. The narrow space all around it was perhaps an open passage facing the monastic cells on the other side. The purpose of this hall is not clear; perhaps it represents the sabbath-hall or *posathāgāra,* i.e. a place where the weekly assembly of the monks took place for mutual edification. Only a few finds came to light in the excavation of this buildings; of them, only one clay tablet, inscribed with the usual Buddhist creed, is worth noting. The monastery is datable to a late period, i.e. the tenth or eleventh century A. D.

## B. The Māthā-kuar shrine

More than a furlong south-west of the Main Site, by the side of the road, is the Māthā-kuar shrine, wherein is installed a colossal statue of Buddha (pl. V), locally called Māthā-kuar. The possible significance of its name has already been referred to (p. 14). The statue measures 3·05 m in height and is carved out of one block of the blue stone of the Gaya region to represent Buddha seated under the Bodhi tree in a pose known as the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* ('earth-touching attitude'), which symbolically expresses the supreme moment in Buddha's life just before his Enlightenment, when he called upon the Earth to bear witness to the pieties performed by him in his previous births. On the base of the statue is an inscription, much effaced and thus not completely readable but otherwise datable to the tenth or eleventh century. The statue was found broken into two pieces and was repaired and restored to its original position in the chapel and the existing temple built to shelter it in 1927 out of the contributions made by the donors referred to above (p. 19).

In 1876, Carlleyle exposed the shrine to which the statue belonged. However, in later excavations it was found that the shrine was not an independent

structure but formed part of much larger building, representing a monastery which measured 34·75 m externally. The monastery consisted of a central open court, 13·41 m square, surrounded by corridors, 2·59 m wide, on all the four sides, which, in turn, faced the usual rows of rooms. The building faced east. In its western flank the central room projected a little beyond the outer wall, since it was meant to be the chapel of the monastery in which the statue was installed on an elaborate brick pedestal. The chapel was once surrounded by a procession-path which detached it from the neighbouring rooms. The excavation here did not yield any important antiquities. Some clay seals bearing the usual Buddhist formula, of about the tenth or eleventh century, were, however, discovered along with other minor objects. But a stone inscription datable to the same period had been found here by Carlleyle; it may have recorded the fact of the construction of the monastery and the chapel attached to it in the reign of a local chief of the Kalachuri dynasty, probably Bhīmaṭa II.[1]

It has been established by partial excavation that this monastery formed part of a large group of subsidiary monuments which once surrounded the Main Stūpa and the Nirvāṇa temple, as is evident from the traces of an extensive wall running all round this group. This wall, now totally concealed below the surrounding fields, was roughly constructed of broken brickbats enclosing a space of nearly 14·5687 hectares in the shape of a rhombus with practically equal sides, each measuring about 381 m in length, and with an entrance, 3·61 m wide, pierced in the eastern half of the southern

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[1] The inscription has been published in V. V. Mirashi, *Inscriptions of the Chedi-Kalachuri Era,* pt. ii, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, IV (Ootacamund, 1955), pp. 375 ff.

wall, not far from the south-eastern corner. Since no such entrance was traceable on the other sides, it is likely that the main approach to the group of monuments inside the enclosure was through this gate. As less than a third of the area has so far been excavated, it is likely that some more monuments lie concealed below the ground of the remaining area inside the enclosure. The position of the wall will be clear from the illustration on p. 17.

## C. The Cremation Stūpa (Rāmabhār)

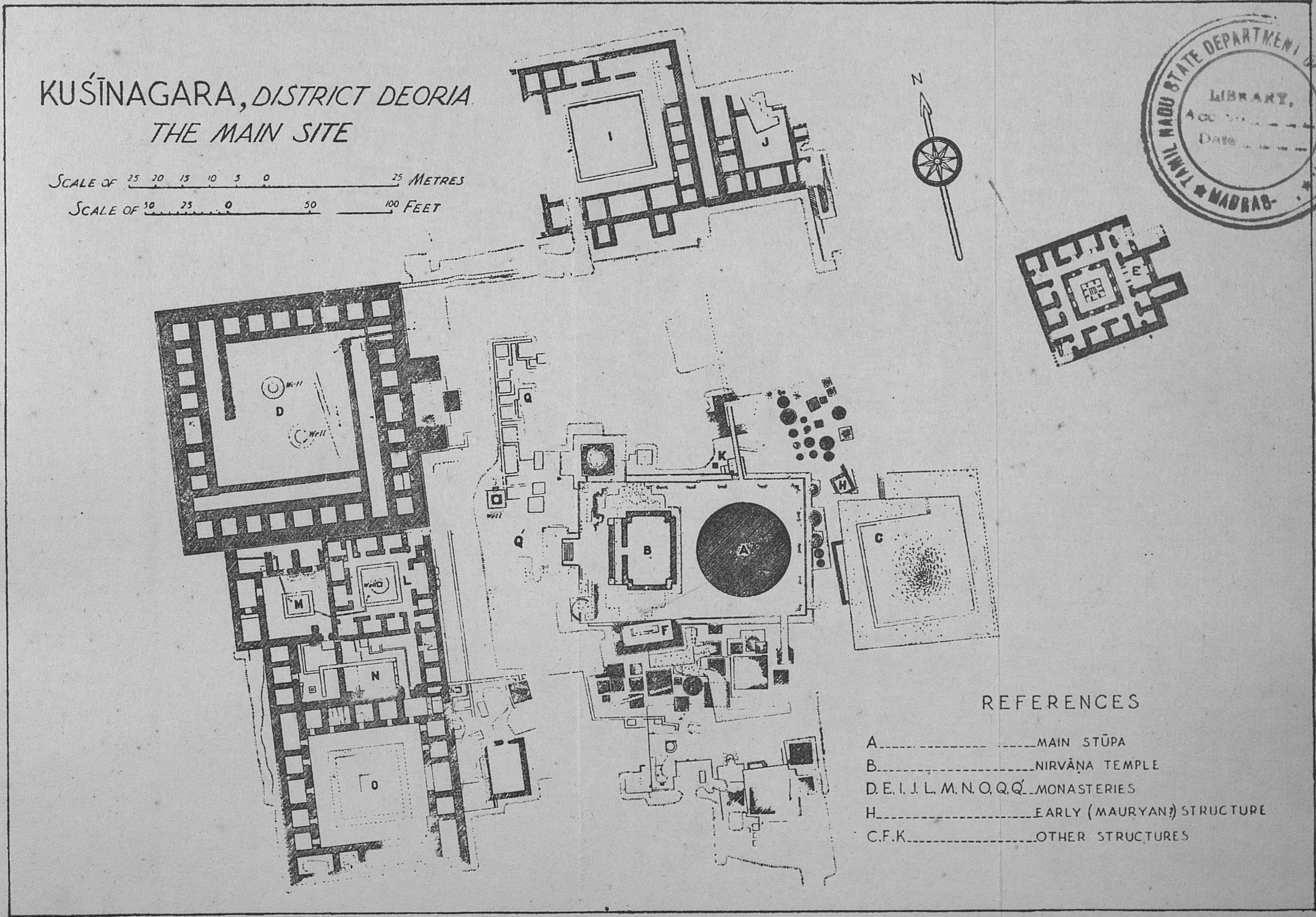
Less than 1·61 km to the east of the Māthā-kuar shrine stands a mound facing the road from Kasia to Deoria. There is a sheet of water, called Rāmabhār Jhīl or pond, close to it, which dries up in summer. Whether the name Rāmabhār originally belonged to the pond or to the mound it is difficult to say; nor can it be satisfactorily derived or its relation to the events of Buddha's death easily explained. Its location in relation to the other monuments at Kuśīnagara and the peculiar character of the monument it represents, however, clearly go to prove that it is the site of the Cremation Stūpa (pl. VI) or the Makuṭabandhana-chaitya of Buddhist tradition (p. 7).

About a hundred years back, the mound attracted the attention of a civil officer, who did some digging at its top, but what he found is not known. Cunningham also tried to dig it but left the attempt. In 1910, another attempt was made by Hirananda Shastri, who, by sinking a shaft at its centre, went down to 1·52 m below the water-level and found a brick flooring and corners of walls; but they indicated nothing about the real character of the buildings to which they belonged. He then exposed part of the eastern face of the mound and discovered that it represented an unusually large *stūpa*

with a huge circular drum, 34·14 m in diameter, resting on a circular plinth, consisting of two or more terraces, and 47·24 m in diameter at the base. In the point of dimensions the *stūpa* appears to have been double the size of the Main Stūpa of the Main Site. Hundreds of clay seals, with the usual Buddhist formulae inscribed on them in medieval characters, were found in the excavation. From the various sizes of bricks of its much-disturbed construction and from some structural traces discovered underneath its basement, it is evident that this monument had seen changes by repairs and renovations. During the year 1956, the entire basement of the *stūpa* was exposed, in the course of which also similar seals were found.

There seems to be no doubt that, like the Main Stūpa, this monument also claimed great sanctity and was likewise surrounded by subsidiary monuments, such as minor *stūpas* or shrines, partly revealed in the excavation of a small portion of the area close to its south-east. Touching its basement was found a building of large bricks, representing an expansive rectangular hall of uncertain purpose and resting on a plinth built of smaller bricks. The other excavated ruins represented the usual minor *stūpas* raised by pilgrims from time to time. It is further obvious that this colossal *stūpa* conceals below itself earlier structures, for, in A.D. 1911-12, when the lowest terrace of its south-eastern basement was partly exposed, traces of such structures, of an uncertain nature, were encountered.

The most interesting but uncommon finds in the excavation of this monument were ornamental bricks so carved that if those of one set are joined together they make the carving of a human figure or other figures of sorts. The bricks were also provided with holes pierced through them, perhaps for facility of quick firing and effective baking in the kiln.

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